

A SOFT WIND WHISPERED ABOUT THE CORNERS OF THE ANCIENT HOUSE, AND IT BORE AN OMINOUS PORTENT! GLADYS WILSON SLOWLY FELT HER WAY UP THE RUTTED PATH! SHE HESITANTLY CLIMBED THE STEPS BUT, IN THE DARKNESS, MISSED HER FOOTING, STUMBLED, AND FELL WITH A THUD ON THE PORCH! EVERY INSTINCT URGED HER TO TURN BACK, BUT SHE KNEW PHIL WAS WAITING IN THE DARK STREET, COUNTING ON HER! THE POOR KNOB RATTLED AND THE DOOR OPENED, CREAKING ON ITS RUSTY HINGES! SHE BARELY STIFLED A SCREAM AT SIGHT OF THE HORRIBLE OLD MAN WHO WAS...

The RECLUSE

B-1862

LOOKS LIKE Y'CAME TO THE WRONG PLACE, LADY--NOBODY COMES TO SEE OLD EZRA COLLINS...NOT ON PURPOSE, ANYWAY!

DESPITE HER PURPOSE IN COMING, GLADYS COULD HARDLY SPEAK AT SIGHT OF THE UGLY, GRINNING FACE...

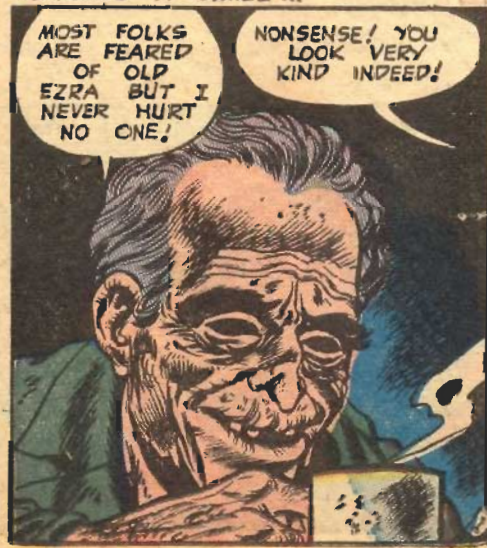
I-I WAS LOOKING FOR 216 RIVER ROAD!

THIS IS 211... BUT COME IN OUT OF THE CHILL AND HAVE SOME HOT TEA!

SHE ENTERED INTO THE EERIE HOUSE WHICH REEKED OF DECAY AND, REMEMBERING HER PURPOSE, MANAGED TO FORCE A SMILE...

MOST FOLKS ARE FEARED OF OLD EZRA BUT I NEVER HURT NO ONE!

NONSENSE! YOU LOOK VERY KIND INDEED!



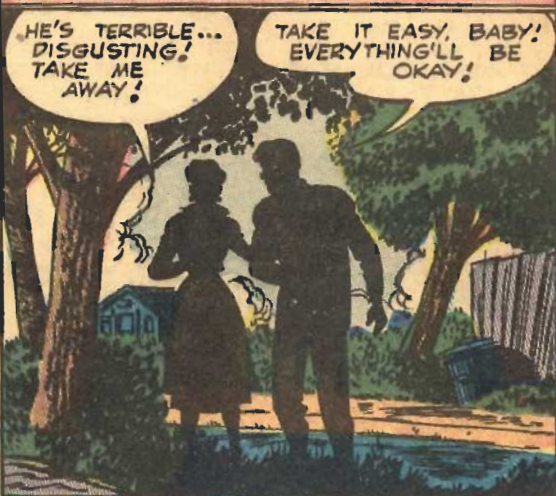
AFTER TEN MINUTES, WHEN SHE WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE, OLD EZRA TOOK HER HAND AND SHE SHUDDERED INVOLUNTARILY...



I LIKE YOU, GLADYS...
I LIKE YOU FINE!
COME SEE ME
AGAIN!

OF COURSE!
I'LL VISIT
YOU SOON
AGAIN!

SHE WAS CALM ONLY UNTIL SHE REACHED PHIL PORTER'S ARMS... THEN SHE BROKE DOWN AND REVEALED HER NEAR HYSTERIA...



HE'S TERRIBLE...
DISGUSTING!
TAKE ME
AWAY!

TAKE IT EASY, BABY!
EVERYTHING'LL BE
OKAY!

AT PHIL'S FLAT...



EVEN IF
I COULD
HOOK HIM
INTO MARRY-
ING ME, HOW
COULD I LIVE
WITH THAT
HORROR?

YOU'D
STAY
ONLY
UNTIL
YOU
FOUND
WHERE
THE
MONEY
IS!

WHAT
IF
THERE
IS
NO
MONEY?

I TOLD YOU HE
WITHDREW \$40,000
FIFTEEN YEARS
AGO! THERE'S
NO OTHER
BANK AROUND!
IT MUST BE
IN THE HOUSE!

IT'LL BE OUR
STAKE... FOR
MARRIAGE,
A HOME...
BUSINESS...

ALL RIGHT,
DEAR!
I'LL
MARRY
HIM!



A FEW MORE VISITS AND THE RECLUSE PROPOSED. THEY WERE MARRIED AT CITY HALL. BACK IN THE DREARY TRASH-FILLED HOUSE SHE WAS NAUSEATED WHEN HE PUT HIS MUMMY-LIKE FACE NEAR HER...



WHAT'S THIS, DEAR...
NO KISS FOR
THE GROOM?

NOT NOW,
EZRA... I'VE
A SPLITTING
HEADACHE!



YOU'LL NEVER FIND MY MONEY, GLADYS!
OTHERS HAVE TRIED, BUT I STILL
HAVE IT... I STILL HAVE IT!

IT WAS SEVERAL DAYS BEFORE GLADYS HAD A CHANCE TO MEET PHIL AT A DESIGNATED MARKET PLACE...



THAT NIGHT, PHIL ENTERED THE BEDROOM WITH A LENGTH OF PIPE! THE OLD MAN KNEW WHAT WAS IN STORE FOR HIM AND HE CRINGED WITH FRIGHT...



A RASPING GURGLE ESCAPED FROM HIS THROAT...



IT TOOK PHIL AN HOUR TO DIG A GRAVE IN THE EARTHEN CELLAR FLOOR...

THEIR SEARCH FOR HOURS THROUGH DIRT AND DUST AND COBWEBS WAS FRUITLESS!



THEY WENT OVER EVERY FOOT OF THE FIRST FLOOR--THE MONEY WAS NOT THERE...



ON THE SECOND FLOOR THEY SAVED THE MURDER ROOM FOR LAST! GLADY'S BROKE AT THE SIGHT OF EZRA'S CHAIR...



THEY BOTH SAW IT AT ONCE \$40,000 IN THE SPRINGS... BLOODSTAINED!



THEY NEVER DID KNOW WHICH OF THEM UP-SET THE KEROSENE LAMP ON THE TABLE...



THE FLAMES SWEEPED THROUGH THE ROOM... THEY GROPE FOR THE WINDOW... THEIR SCREAMS ECHOED IN THE DARKNESS...



THE OLD HOUSE WAS AN INFERNO WHEN THE AMBULANCE CAME. IT WAS A MONTH OF TIGHT AND GO FOR THEM BUT THEY MADE IT!



GIVE THE SCARS ANOTHER DAY OR SO... BUT YOU CAN GO HOME IF YOU LIKE!





WE CAN GO HOME, DEAR!

HOME? TO WHAT? WE'RE AS BAD OFF AS WHEN WE STARTED!

THEY WENT TO THE OLD HOUSE GLADYS TRYING TO LIFT PHIL'S SPIRITS...



THE GOVERNMENT RESTORES BURNT MONEY... I READ ABOUT IT, PHIL!

SURE, BABY! ALL WE GOTTA DO IS FIND IT!

ONLY CHARRED DEBRIS GREETED THEIR EYES EVERYWHERE THEY LOOKED! THERE WAS HOPELESSNESS AND BITTERNESS IN PHIL'S VOICE...



WE'VE LIVED THROUGH A NIGHTMARE AND FOR WHAT?

WE'RE YOUNG, PHIL! WE'LL GET MARRIED... BOTH GET JOBS...



NEW ENTHUSIASM TOOK HOLD OF THEM...

THESE BANDAGES ARE DEPRESSING US!

OFF WITH 'EM, BABY! YOU'RE ONE IN A MILLION!



SLOWLY, CAREFULLY, GLADYS UNWRAPPED HER BEAUTIFUL FACE BUT PHIL'S STARTLED EYES, HIS CHOKING GASP, TOLD HER IT WAS NO LONGER BEAUTIFUL!

PHIL CRIED OUT IN DISGUST AT THE SIGHT OF HER... HE SHRIEKED AS SHE RAN PAST HIM...



MARRY A MONSTROUS, VILE-LOOKING OLD WITCH? GET OUT OF MY SIGHT!

...AND HE KEPT SHRIEKING EVEN AFTER SHE WAS GONE...



YOU'RE UGLY! YOU'RE UGLY! GLADYS ...HORRIBLY UGLY! HOW COULD I MARRY A HORROR LIKE YOU?

THE END